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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Science
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Rituals of Ascent

by
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June 2002

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Statement of Purpose

A simple white bowl and clean water – that is all our ancestors needed for the daily ritual before sunrise. In this way the spirit is purified and the prayer ascends. Traditional Korean ceremony honors ancestral spirits and the spirit of nature: earth, sky, and water influence harvest and health – indeed, influence all things that matter to human life.

When Catholicism was introduced into Korea about 400 years ago, it was not immediately accepted, but now many Koreans are Catholic. The Church has had a big influence on Korean life. I myself am a Korean Catholic and find that the Mass always reminds me of my mother's daily ritual. From earliest childhood, I remember seeing my mother pray with an old ceramic bowl of fresh water early every morning. I don't know what she prayed for. But there was a sense of Korean tradition and simplicity in her practice, which I personally couldn't feel at Catholic Mass.

How, I wondered, can I make the Catholic mass more meaningful to Korean Catholics? For my MFA thesis project, I have worked to create objects for use in the Catholic Church that fit well with the Korean sensibility. My altarpieces represent the ideal of nature – earth and sky – that our ancestors have honored for 6000 years.

Today, I hope that my work can create a specifically Korean feeling in the Catholic ritual objects presented here. I hope, too, that those who see my work can share my joy in the joining of Eastern and Western religious traditions through these ceramic rituals of ascent.

Introduction

When I was a small child, I went to the Catholic Church with my family every Sunday morning. Even though I had to get up early, it was a pleasure for me. My mother always prepared clean clothes and shoes for me, and money in a white envelope for the offering. After the Mass, all of my relatives had lunch together. We were all Catholics and the mass was a weekly family ritual. Most of all, I enjoyed looking at the altar and interior decorations during the mass. In my memory, every morning my mother had a prayer time at home with an old ceramic bowl of water. It was a traditional Korean personal ceremony. Our mothers pray with this water before sunrise when the moon is still in the sky. Even though my mother was a strong Catholic, her ceremony was a mixture of Eastern and Western religion. She was following our Korean traditions instinctively.

When I was 26 years old, I married a man who grew up in a traditional Korean family. His family was so conservative that they couldn't accept any practices of Christianity. Since becoming married, I have hosted a family ceremony seven times a year for the purpose of honoring our ancestors. For this ceremony, all family members get together and prepare food that the specific honored ancestor liked when he or she was alive. The ceremony is held on the anniversary of the ancestor's death. All of the liturgical objects for this ceremony are made in the style of ancient Korean ceremonial vessels.

Having had the experience of this traditional ceremony, I began to think that the Catholic Mass is missing something meaningful for the Korean people. Even though Koreans have practiced Catholicism for over 400 years, we don't have our own Catholic artworks. Most of our Catholic artworks are still imported. Some manufacturers now make objects for the Catholic Mass in Korea and these

objects are similar to those used in Europe. These machine-made objects are not valuable as artworks and don't fit our sensibility. I think that art allows us to meet Christ as an inner and intimate spiritual reality, not as a figure limited by historical and theological circumstances.

Korea has more than 5,000 years of history in ceramics, and many of our ceramic objects were used as ritual objects. It is true that Catholicism did not originate in Korea. But as a Korean Catholic, even from childhood, I wanted to pray with objects which retain our heritage and spirit. Now, as a maker of ritual objects, I try to give my Catholic ritual objects a Korean identity, which is simple yet sophisticated.

Catholicism in Korea

At the end of the 16th century, western missionaries, who were working in China, introduced Catholicism into Korea. Catholic doctrines written in Chinese were spread and read by Koreans. Catholicism was not accepted immediately because its theology opposed the traditional Korean ceremonies for honoring nature and ancestors. The government and conservative nobility outlawed Catholicism. In this process, many believers and churchmen, including some who were foreigners, met tragic ends.

In 1886, as a result of a trade and commercial agreement between Korea and France, Catholicism became legal in Korea. At the present time, there are about 2,750,000 Catholics (6.32% of the population) in Korea, and they have canonized 103 saints to date. Many feel that Catholicism has influenced Korean soci-

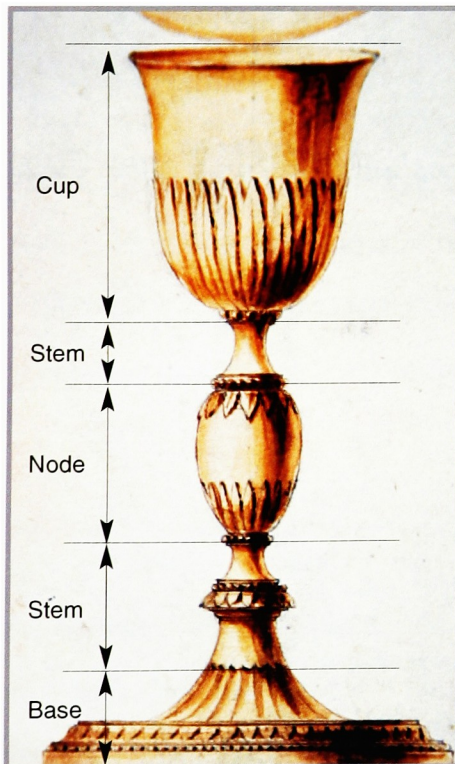
ety positively. For example, western scientific knowledge and medical science were introduced into Korea with Catholicism. Also, Catholicism influenced the worldview of Koreans: in the politically confused 1980s, the Catholic Church led the democratic reform movement in Korea.

Catholic Liturgical Objects For The Mass

Chalice

The chalice is one of the most important liturgical objects for Catholic Mass. It is the cup from which the consecrated wine and water are partaken at Holy Communion. Also it refers to the Last Supper and the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. Traditionally, a chalice is composed of a cup, node (also called

[Fig 1]



knob or knop), stem, and base (fig. 1).

According to the book *A Priest Speaks On Chalice-design*, the cup of the chalice is “governed by considerations of the safe and decorous consumption of the consecrated species, and by those of through and rapid purification.”¹ The node is the spot where the celebrant’s thumb and index fingers touch to hold the chalice. Thus the node plays a role in the safe handling of the chalice under difficult conditions. The stem is the part connecting the

¹. Graham Carey. *A Priest Speaks On Chalice-design*. New York, the Catholic Art Quarterly.1951 Page 8.

base and the cup of the chalice. The design of the stem is determined by considerations of visual appearance and function; it should be thick enough for strength and provide a sure grip. The base of the chalice has been variously designed throughout ages and cultures. Most important, the base design is focused on stability, so that some chalices even have small unnoticeable feet on the bottom of the base.

Ciborium

The ciborium is a containing vessel for the reserved Host. Also it symbolizes the Eucharist and the Last Supper (fig .2). It is clear that in most cases, the ciborium is designed in the same style as the chalice, with which it makes a set. The cup of the ciborium is round rather than oval, and provided with a conical cover surmounted by a cross or some other appropriate device. The bottom of the cup should be a little raised at the center so that the last particles may be easily removed and the purification more conveniently performed.



[Fig 2]

Paten

The paten is a shallow plate or disc of metal--often precious--upon which the element of bread is offered to God at the Mass, and upon which the consecrated Host is again placed after the Fraction. According to *Signs And Symbols In Christian Art*, "It symbolizes the dish used at the Last Supper."² It is known that

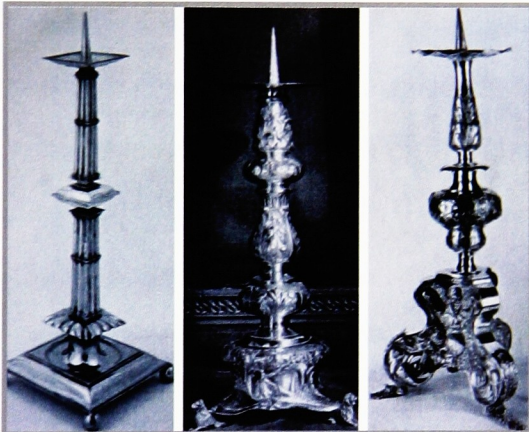
². George Ferguson. *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art*. New York, Oxford University Press.1959 Page 102.

[Fig 3]



two basic designs of paten were used since the middle age. One of them has a central part, which is sunk into a single depression, in either a circu-

lar or multifold design. In the other case, there are two depressions; one is circular and the other is multifold (fig .3).



[Fig 4]

Candlesticks

The use of candles at a Mass is universal and frequently seen in Renaissance art. Usually only one pair of candlesticks is placed on the altar. Most of them are made of silver and bronze; they are likely to have a molded stem with some sort

of a node, a rounded of polygonal grease pan, and a base (fig .4).

Altar

The Christian altar is a table of stone or wood. Most altars are carved with patterns based on Christian symbol. Liturgically the altar faces the east, and it is covered with a pure white linen cloth, which extends downward on both sides of altar.

Historical Research: Korean Ritual Ceramic Objects

The practice of ceramics in Korea is ancient; it started about 5,000 years ago. Indeed, as in any country with a long and rich history, diverse kinds of ceramics coexisted throughout the ages. It is assumed that some ceramic vessels were used as ceremonial objects because they were found in tombs and had a ceremonial character to their shape. Also it is true that the popularity and style of Far Eastern ceramics have been influenced by the culture of tea drinking, which is a kind of ritual. By way of providing Korean historical information and background necessary to my project, I would like to focus on the following: (1) earthenware stands in the age of Kaya (BC ~562 AD); (2) the long stem unglazed gray stoneware dishes of Silla (669~935); (3) the celadon wine bowls and stands of Koryo (918~1,392); and (4) the tea bowls of Chosun (1392~1910). Usually, the Chosun is known as a Yi-dynasty in Western countries, but in Korea, we do not use the Chinese style name. We call it Chosun.

Kaya (BC~562 AD)

In the Kaya royal tombs, several kinds of long stem vessels and stands were found. It is known that some vessels, which have reasonable sized stems to grip, were used as containers for wine (fig .5). In respect to form and architecture, they have much in common with European Catholic chalices. Thus, they are composed of cups, stems and feet.



[Fig 5]

[Fig 6]



The other groups of vessels, which have shallow dishes, are assumed to have been used as stands upon which bowls for our Korean fruit

or rice wine could be placed. They are approximately 40~50 cm high. Even though they have long and thin bodies, the feet are fluted and wide, which makes the stand look stable (fig .6). I was influenced and inspired by these Korean features seen in the Kaya stands. The simplicity of the technique and unsophisticated style of decoration showed me what typically Korean beauty could be.



[Fig 7]

Silla (669~935)

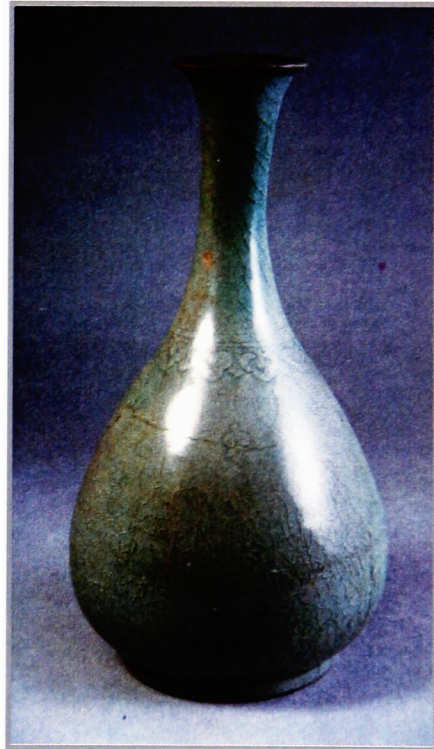
In the age of Silla, Kaya style stands were still in existence. But Silla stands had more ceremonial aspects. The stems became longer than those of the Kaya period and some of them were decorated with small clay human figures. It is known that most Silla vessels were made for ritualistic use. Also, there were some unusual humorous ritual objects in this period, among them drinking cups in the shape of a shoe and of a horn (fig .7).

Koryo (918~1392)

The celadon glazed ceramic object symbolizes the Koryo period in Korea.

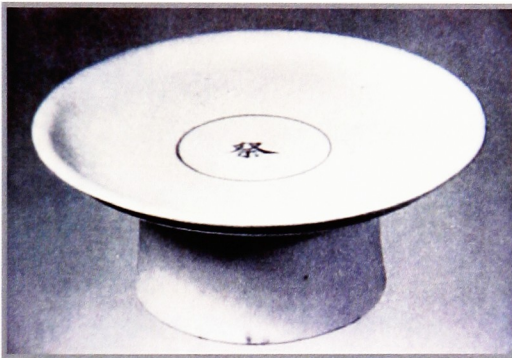
Because Buddhism became prosperous in this age, many celadon ritual objects were produced for Buddhist society. During the early Koryo period, the unglazed high-fired gray stoneware of Silla was still being produced, but such pieces were for the common people. Only the royalty, nobility, and Buddhist practitioners could use celadon glazed ceramic objects.

The inlaid ten lobed celadon cup with stand in the 12th century (fig .8) has deeply affected the idea and execution of my own project. I responded to the relationships between the designs of rim, cup, and foot. The lotus-style pattern, one of the central Buddhism symbols, is carved into this cup and saucer set (fig .9). It is assumed that these cups were made for the ritualistic use in Buddhist society. Koryo celadon portrays a sort of gracious dignity. I was especially fascinated with the subtlety of line in the long neck celadon bottle (fig .10). These pieces are ample but still gracious.



[Fig 8, 9, 10]

[Fig 11, 12]



Chosun (1392~1910)

Koryo celadon was made and used for the nobility and Buddhist society, but the tea bowls of the Chosun period might have been used by common people. Most of the porcelain and Bunchung bowls were made in this period. White porcelain was made in larger volume than any other type of ware throughout the Chosun period and has survived in great numbers. As is usually the case with bowls made for use by common people,

they were not designed with highly specific purposes in mind. They became rice bowls at the home dinner table, and at banquets, they were used as wine bowls. The deep body and tall foot make the bowls look impressively vigorous (fig .11). Generally, Chosun tea bowls appear dignified but not arrogant. Chosun white porcelain bowls showed and taught me what our identity is: in this simple bluish white tone, I could sense the feeling of the Korean people. Such qualities seem to me exactly what are needed in the design of a chalice for use in the Korean Catholic Mass.

Besides bowls, there were several kinds of ceremonial ceramics in Chosun period. The porcelain ritual dish, used for family ceremonies, is one of them (fig .12). Frequently, they have high octagonal or rounded feet, which are used even at the present time in rituals for offerings.

Historical Research: Western Church Art

Early Christian art took diverse directions in painting, architecture, mosaic, sculpture, metal work and jewelry. Even though these art works were created as manifestations of religion, Christian art is not an isolated subject that matters only to Christian believers and societies. For centuries, throughout the world, many great artists have worked on Christian art and a great number of museums have considerable space for them.

Christian art was first developed in the Near East, but soon after Christian artworks were created in diverse regions of the world. Historically, the style of Christian art differs according to the region and culture. As Katharine Morrison McClinton, the author of *Christian Art Through the Ages*, states, “Christian art developed simultaneously in many parts of the ancient world and was an expression of the art of diverse peoples. Although early Christian art varied with each race and environment, there was an over-all unity.”³

Although many works considered as fine art made for the Church have come down to us, far fewer of the objects crafted by goldsmiths and silversmiths have survived. The author of *The Origins of Christian Art*, Michael Gough, writes “Metalwork of the earlier centuries is a rarity, since gold and silver have been far too easily melted down by thieves or persons ignorant of a value beyond quantity or weight.”⁴ Obviously, this creates a problem for research on ritual objects.

Customarily, the Catholic Mass includes the following objects on the altar: a wine chalice, candlesticks, a ciborium and paten for the wafer, and a crucifix. Sometimes large candlesticks stood on both sides of the altar. The Christian altar consists of an elevated surface, tabular in form, on which the Sacrifice of the Mass

³. Katharine Morrison McClinton. *Christian Church Art Through the Ages*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962. Page 29.

⁴. Michael Gough. *The Origins of Christian Art*. New York, Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1974. Page 136.

[Fig 13, 14]



is offered. The earliest Christian altar was of wood, and identical in form with the ordinary house tables. In medieval times, the altar itself was usually a slab of stone with columns and solid stonework between.⁵

The color of the church was also concentrated about the altar. According to Katharine Morrison McClinton, “silver ciboria were often built over the altar, and jeweled chalices and reliquaries, Gospel books, and candlesticks were used on the altar.”⁶

I would like to write mostly about the chalice, a main object in the Mass. One of the most famous and important liturgical objects is the Antioch chalice of silver and gilt (fig .13). The good Shepherd among vineyard motif cut in this vessel suggests an early date, approximately between the late fourth and late sixth centuries.

During the golden age of Byzantine art, many talented artists produced church vessels for use in the Church service. The achievement in this area was a result of finding the materials for their beauty, color, and richness. The Byzantine silver chalice, sixth century, in the Walters Art Gallery, in Baltimore, takes a low and heavy shape compared to the chalices of a later age (fig .14). The Cross-and Lord’s Prayer carved in this vessel shows more

⁵ . Much of the information here presented is drawn from The Catholic Encyclopedia, available in print or on line <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen>

⁶ . Katharine Morrison McClinton. *Christian Church Art Through the Ages*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962. Page 57.

developed skill, and the fluted foot gives a chalice stable feeling. Since the era of medieval art, the size of the cup has become smaller, and the four sections of the chalice-cup, node, stem, have become more distinct.

The 8th century Ardagh chalice(fig .15) could be an example of the best of Irish art. The cup itself is made of silver, and some of the decoration is of gold wire or foil. Enamel is used on the ornamental band below the rim and two handles. The Trehwiddle Chalice of the second half of the 9th century in the British Museum is entirely undecorated (fig .16). Oman, the author of *English Church Plate*, writes “This chalice must be classified as a traveling chalice made for the purpose of providing ecclesiastics with the where-withal for saying mass when on their journeys.”⁷

The Chalices made from 1100~1300, the period of Romanesque and Gothic art culture, are characterized by the use of a broad and shallow bowl. Generally they have round cups and plain nodes and feet (fig .17). Compared to the chalices of an earlier age, they are as graceful and slender as the lines of the architecture.

In most countries of Western Europe, the designs of feet started to change from round to hexagonal with incurved sides from the beginning of the 14th century (fig .18). But the elaborated hexagonal base was fragile and the points often

[Fig 15, 16,17]



⁷ Charles Oman. *English Church Plate 597-1830*. London: Oxford University Press. 1957. Page 39.

[Fig 18, 19, 20]



broke off. Therefore, these kinds of hexagon-footed chalices were superseded after 1500 by dome-footed chalices, which are more stable (fig .19).

In Roman Catholic Baroque art, the height of the chalice increased. The inner tulip-shaped cup is put within a shorter outer cup. The decoration of the outer cup became more complex, and several kinds of color or jewels were used for decoration (fig .20).



From the 18th century, the decorations started to be simplified so that only a few religious symbols were carved. And the 19-20th century metal craftsmen followed the trend of functionalism and simplicity. Most craftsmen were priests before they became craftsmen. They designed the sizes, proportions, and forms on the basis of function.

As can be seen from the above, the chalices have changed throughout the ages and have greatly influenced the development of metal craft.



Contemporary

Exploring ceramic ritual objects for my MFA thesis, most of my research was historical. Because my project is deeply related with history, I needed to understand about historical ceremonial vessels: what they are, how they developed and what their difference from ordinary vessels is. This fundamental historical knowledge made me aware of the necessity of understanding the contemporary climate also: what are the trends? who are the other artists working in my field? and how are they related to history?

Researching ceremonial objects based on history, I found the Japanese Tea Ceremony a rewarding subject, with historical and contemporary relevance. Japanese Family of Raku has been creating Tea Ceremony Utensils since the 16th century. As a matter of fact, a great part of the Japanese Tea Ceremony is based on cultural elements introduced from China and Korea. But it is also true that the Japanese took those cultural elements, and, applying their own aesthetic sensibility, have developed and transformed them to fit Japanese culture. Perhaps the greatest Tea Master in Japan might be Sen-no-Rikyu (AD 1522~1591). He established the concept of '*wabi*' which is loosely translated as austerity or simplicity. The spirit of *wabi* was sought by Rikyu in his choice of tea ware: he therefore commissioned Chojiro to craft Raku Tea Utensils which would best represent the idea of *wabi*. At the present time, the Japanese Tea Ceremony has come to be recognized by people around the world as a distinctive art form of Japan. Japanese Tea Utensils have been reshaped throughout the generations. The descendants of the Japanese Raku Family have accepted their rich historical inheritance and through it have successfully expressed contemporary sensibilities. The 15th Raku

[Fig 21]



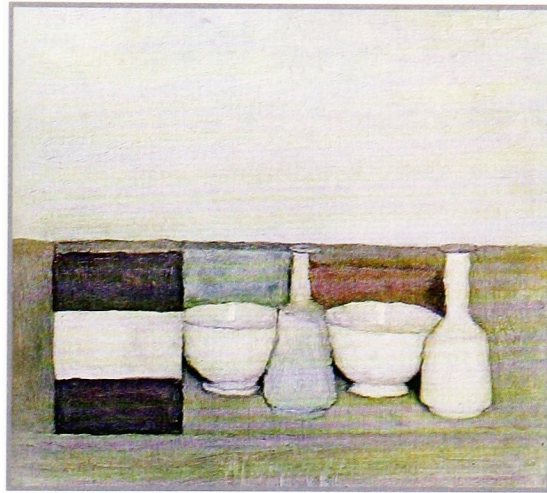
generation Kichizaemon XV, for example, is descended from and carries on the tradition of Chojiro who, in the 16th century, crafted the first Raku Tea Bowls. As the 15th Raku generation, Kichizaemon XV further developed Japanese Tea Ceremony

Utensils and established his own aesthetic style. His pieces appear dynamic. He boldly trimmed the surface vertically and horizontally (fig.21). Also he introduced decoration into the traditional Raku Ceremonial Utensils. There is evidence of the influence of Abstract Expressionism in his painterly surfaces. But the objects themselves still belong in the historical tradition of Tea Ceremony Utensils. Studying Japanese Tea Ceremony Utensils and Kichizaemon XV's work helped me to interpret tradition and to create ceremonial objects that fit well with contemporary sensibilities.

Studying western art has also helped me develop my style as an artist whose work embodies more than one tradition. During the past two years at RIT, I had many chances to participate in conferences, workshops, and exhibitions. I saw great artworks with my own eyes, an exhilarating and useful experience for me as an international student working in the US. Most of all, I was influenced by the work of Hans Coper (1920~1981). Last year when I first saw his work, I was fascinated by one of his pots, which was quite small, soft in outline, and boldly decorated with linear designs in white and brown. While I was working on ceremonial objects over the last year, Hans Coper's works were always in my mind. Even though his works are not for ritualistic use, they have a kind of ceremonial feeling-

-they are quiet in form, have depth of surface, and strong vertical lines that draw the eye upwards(fig.22).

As a set maker, the presentation was an important issue for me. Hans Coper's pieces, presented together, showed me dialogues between the pots. His intention of presentation is clear; the display seems completely controlled by the forms, sizes, and proportions of each piece. Also still life paintings of Giorgio Morandi (1890~1964) were a



good reference for my presentation. In his still life paintings, Morandi groups familiar and repeated objects together so that they touch, hide, and, in combination, create new patterns of great interest(fig.23). His paintings shaped my understanding how to make a completely finished work with independent pieces, and it showed me what the space between the pots performs. The use of space, of course, is very important. Morandi's use of space reminds me of the Far Eastern black and white paintings, which value space highly, above everything else. The process of presentation raises many questions that I am still trying to answer.

The work of Betty Woodman (1930~) influenced me to think in new ways about ritual and history. Her reference to historical ceramics is clear. As a maker of ritualistic objects based in history, I saw great creativity in her works: she shows

[Fig 24]



how history can be introduced and individualized by contemporary artists. She displays the function of decoration and the power of exaggeration. Her representative shapes and impetuous glazing created a unified relationship

between her vases and bases. In spite of the painterly fine art character of her work, her pieces seem basically pleasant crafts, which make our daily lives joyous (fig. 24). If Hans Coper's works are rituals honoring an eternal spirit, Woodman's work might be a more intimate ritual, like rites for an old friend.

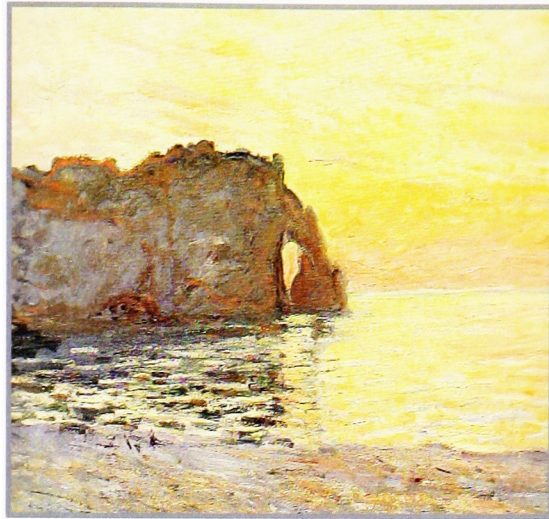
Just as these artists influenced my work in form and presentation, so the Impressionist painters influenced my use of color and texture, especially in rendering the appearance of sky. Impressionism is a light, spontaneous manner of painting, which began in France as a reaction against the formalism of the dominant Academic style. Its naturalistic and down-to-earth treatment of its subjects has its roots in the French Realism of Corot and others. The movement's name came from Claude Monet's early work, *Impression: Sunrise*.⁸

Monet's landscape paintings were especially useful references when I was trying to resolve issues of surface treatment. Monet chiefly embodied in his painting the shifting play of light throughout a day and the seasons. His painting showed me the essential character of nature: landscape and its sky or sea cannot be static. According to the observer and the time -- morning, noon, or twilight-- hundreds of different realities can exist in landscape. Impressionist artists didn't stay in the studio. They painted outdoors and came to realize that landscape is moving and not composed of only white, blue, green and black-- sometimes it

⁸. Much of the information here presented is drawn from the online <http://www.artcyclopedia.com/history>

could be yellow, gray, orange, and red.

Monet's painting is especially interesting to me because of the ideas and observation of nature behind the work. He endeavored to seize the fleeting moments of light as reflected on the surface of an object, the effect



of light on his eye, and achieved a beauty and a harmony that a photographically realistic rendering could not achieve (fig. 25). His bold use of vibrating brushstrokes could create variations in a single color, thus effectively contrasting those areas which absorb light and those which reflect it. In my glaze, I tried to embody these Impressionist techniques.

Development of My Work

In my work of exploring and creating Korean-style Catholic Mass objects, there were several requirements for satisfying my ideas and intentions. The first requirement involves Korean aesthetic sensibility. As can be seen from the above, Korean Catholic objects have always followed the style of Western Church art. Although many Buddhist arts continued to flourish in Korea, far fewer of original Christian art works were developed and created there. To give my works a Korean aesthetic feeling, clay and glaze were very valuable materials. Because for us

Koreans, the art of ceramics is a most precious heritage, I tried to discover the essential nature of Korean beauty by studying Korean ceramic ritual objects. I didn't want simply to make imitations of historic ceramic objects. Tradition has to be inherited, developed, and individualized by contemporary craftsmen. My work is a harmony of our heritage and western aesthetic sensibility as I have learned to understand it during the last two years.

The second requirement I wanted to satisfy was function. Historically, the utility of ceremonial objects was essential. Because these objects were offerings for the faith, they needed to be stable so that they would not fall and break in use. Most of all, I tried to create the feeling of sure grip in my chalices. Because my pieces are tall and thin in proportion, it is important that they stand securely and that the feet be well designed.

But it is also true that my works are not for common people and everyday life. I don't want my works only to be useful; they need to be meaningful enough to serve as liturgical objects. Thus, the final requirement that I wanted to satisfy is the ceremonial feeling. For this purpose, I embodied the nature of Korea -earth and sky- in my thesis exhibition works. In general, nature was presented as an object of worship. Koreans, especially, have honored nature throughout the ages. So nature was an effective subject, giving my works ceremonial feeling and Korean sensibility.

All of my works for the thesis exhibition were created as one body of work. In this section of essay, I would like to describe them generally and display images of my works. All of my pieces are composed of four families: chalices, ciboria, candleholders, and altars.

The chalices were made by joining two or more thrown shapes: cup, stem and base. I formed them variously by changing the proportions, but tried not to

lose the basic chalice style. Some of my chalices were designed in the style of Korean Chosun tea bowls. These chalices were finished without stems and placed on their own footed-plate-form bases, which were hand formed with clay slabs. All pieces were altered after they were thrown so that they have movement, like clouds in the sky. The ciboria were made in a process similar to that of the chalices. But they have lids and knobs, which were designed in the style of the stem and thrown on the wheel. In each set, the ciboria have different heights and proportions from the chalices, so that they will show an interesting balance and contrast when they are presented on the clay altars. The candleholders were made in one of two designs. One is designed in the style of the chalice: thus these candleholders have long stems and rounded grease pans. The other candleholders are based on Korean shallow tea bowls and rice cake stands with round top-surfaces, which are typical of ceremonial ware in Korea. They are low compared to the chalice and ciborium. I poured melted wax in the candleholders to make candles in harmony with my design.

All of my objects of the Mass represent sky. I wanted to give the forms of objects some character of movement, thus the undulant rims and delicately asymmetric shapes. The color and surface are about sky as well. Sky has various colors and textured appearance, depending on the time and season. White and dark blue slip was applied on green ware by dipping or rubbing to make the desired texture and color. I applied multiple-layered glazes with the technique of dipping and air-brushing. They were bisque fired to cone 06 and glaze fired to cone 04 in the electric kiln.

The altars express earth. The relationship between the objects and altar is that of contrast. Their form is derived from the traditional Korean wooden table. The basic form of the altars is rectangular; however, the objects upon them have

soft and rounded forms. The altars were made with solid clay; I shaped them by carving when they were in leather hard condition. To make a dramatic contrast between the altars and objects, red-iron wash was brushed on the altars when they were in bone-dry condition. Most of all, keeping the flat form was troublesome. To dry the altars evenly, I turned them over every day. I finished altars by firing them to cone 04 in the electric kiln.

Through the processes of exploration, repetition, and variation, I was able to come closer to my goal of creating objects that satisfy Korean aesthetic sensibility, ritual function, and ceremonial feeling. My work in ceramics has helped me to put contemporary and traditional, religious and secular, ritual and functional, eastern and western aspects of my experience as an artist into a relation of harmony.

Portfolio

Rituals of Ascent

by

Mihyun Choi

Altar Set #1

2002

Wine Bowl 5"x 6" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candle holders 5.2"x4.8", 4.5"x4" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 24"x3.5" Terracotta

Altar Set #2

2002

Chalice 4"x10.2" Blue slip and satin glaze
Ciborium 3.8"x11" Blue slip and satin glaze
Candleholder 4.7"x5" Low fire polychrome glazes

Altar Set #3

2002

Chalice 4.2"x12.5" Low fire polychrome glazes
Ciborium 4.4"x12.4" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 6"x4" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 28"x4.8" Terracotta

Altar Set #4

2002

Wine bowl 4.8"x6" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholders 5"x11.8" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 3.7"x30" Terracotta

Altar Set #5

2002

Candleholder 1 6.8"x11.2" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 2 6.8"x10.7" Low fire polychrome glazes

Altar Set #6

2002

Chalice 3.6"x12.2" Low fire polychrome glazes
Ciborium 3.5"x11.7" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 6.2"x5.4" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 29"x3.1" Terracotta

Altar Set #7

2002

Chalice 5.2"x 12.3" Low fire polychrome glazes
Ciborium 5.2"x 13" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 4.8"x8" Low fire polychrome glazes
Paten 5.5"x 1.8" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 30"x 3.7" Terracotta

Altar Set #8

Chalice 5.5"x12.5" Low fire polychrome glazes
Ciborium 3.2"x12.8" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 7"x5.2" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 3.7"x30" Terracotta

Altar Set #9

Chalice 4.2"x 10.5" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 7.5"x5" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 24"x3.5" Terracotta

Altar Set #10

Chalice 4.4"x10.8" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 7.8"x 5.6" Low fire polychrome glazes
Tray 24"x3.5" Terracotta

Altar Set #11

Chalice 4"x8.5" Low fire polychrome glazes
Ciborium 4.2"x12.1" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 7.2"x5" Low fire polychrome glazes

Altar Set #12

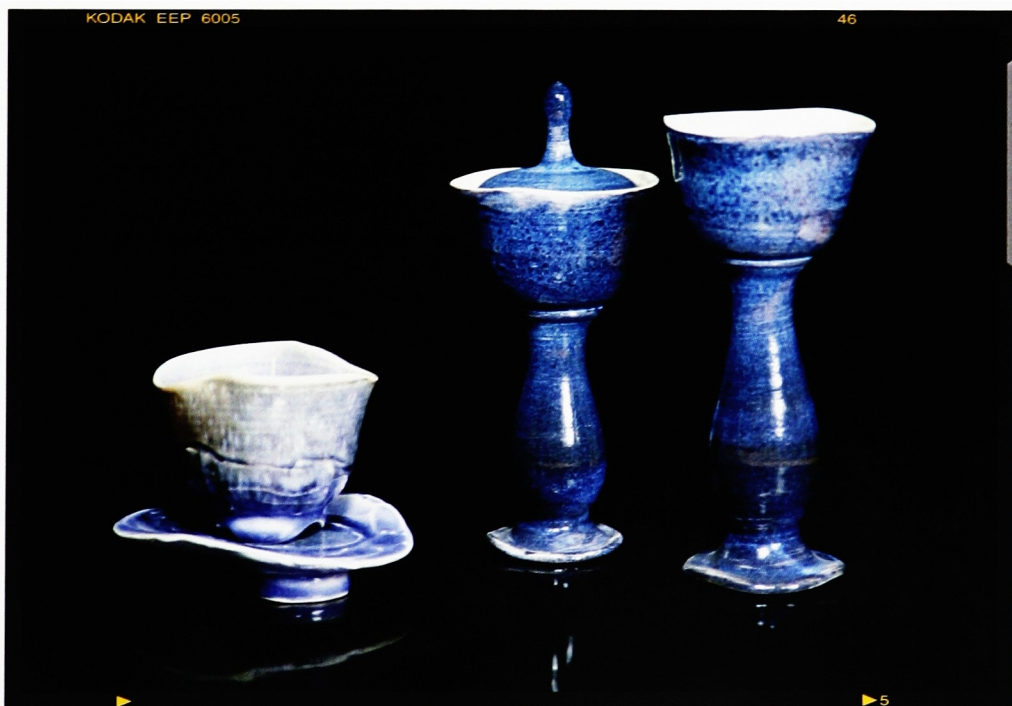
Ciborium 3.8"x 7.2" Low fire polychrome glazes
Candleholder 7.4"x5.5" Low fire polychrome glazes

Altar Set #13

Chalice 3.3"x8.2" Black slip and blue glaze
Candleholder 5"x 3.6" Black slip and blue glaze



Altar Set #1



Altar Set #2



Altar Set #3



Altar Set #4



Altar Set #5



Altar Set #6



Altar Set #7



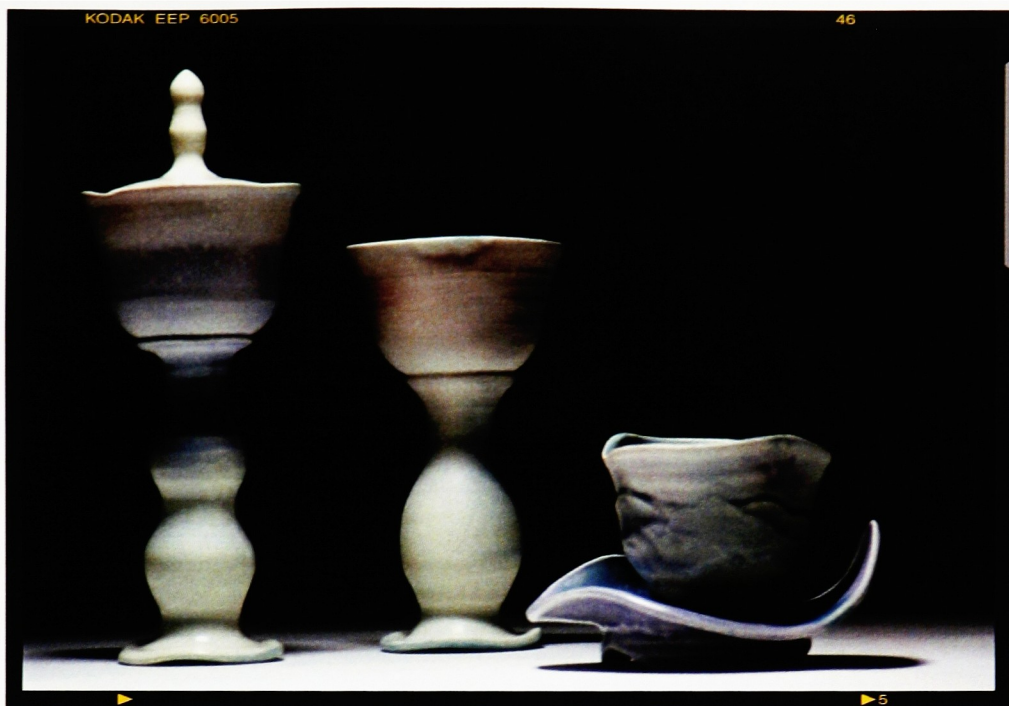
Altar Set #8



Altar Set #9



Altar Set #10



Altar Set #11



Altar Set #12



Altar Set #13

Technical information

White earthenware clay (cone 04)

Talc	50
OM 4 ball clay	35
Tile 6 Kaolin	15

Red earthenware clay (cone 04)

Red art clay	70
Gold art clay	10
OM4 Ball clay	10
Flint	5
Talc	5
Medium Grog	10

AG Majolica (cone 04)

Frit 3124	70
Whiting	7
Kona F-4 Feldspar	14
EPK	10
Zinc	4
Cobalt Carbonate	0.25
Rutil	0.25

VC Tartransparent satin (cone 04)

Frit 3124	52
Kona F-4 Feldspar	15
Gersely Borate	17
Whiting	3
EPK	2
Flint	11

Ann's white (cone 04)

Frit 3124	85
Flint	5
EPK	10
Whiting	23

Trnasparent blue (cone 04)

Frit 3124	70
Whiting	7
Kona F-4 Feldspar	14
EPK	10
Zinc	4
Cobalt Carbonate	0.25
Rutil	0.25

John Gill's blue, revised (cone 04)

Frit	76
Gersely Borate	5
EPK	8
Flint	10
Cobalt Carbonate	0.1
Copper Carbonate	1

Ann's green (cone 04)

Frit 3124	85
Flint	5
EPK	10
Cobalt Carbonate	0.1
Copper Carbonate	2

Conclusion

When I first came to America two years ago, I enjoyed imagining what I would learn and how my works would change over the next two years.

Imagination itself was full of joy. I expected myself to be a special artist, someone different from ordinary Korean artists. But the more I concentrated on working in America, the more clearly I realized my identity: who I am, where I am from. Two years in an American school has made me aware of my roots.

To me, everything in the US was exotic: food, customs, language... only one thing here is same as in Korea. It is the Catholic Church and Mass. I also understood, conversely, that Korea doesn't have its own Christian culture even though we have a 400-year history of Catholicism. This is the main reason why I made Catholic Mass objects for my thesis. I wanted to create something which is related both to Korea and to me. Also I tried to give my works a more individualized character by combining them with the new knowledge and aesthetic values that I acquired during the course of my studies in America.

At this time, I am not sure if I have successfully represented the Korean sensibility in my work, and I don't know if Korean Catholics would accept the validity of my project. But it is clear that I have made a strong body of work for my thesis project over the past two years and this progress gives me confidence and direction in the face of so many choices.

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